

Seventh Day Adventists and the Bearing of Arms

The Seventh Day Adventist churches are grouped together in local conferences, the local conferences

Union Conferences and the ten Union Conferences of the United States are merged into the North American Division Conference. At the annual spring council of the Executive Committee of this North American Division Conference, April 12-19, 1917, the following pronouncement concerning the present crisis was made:

TO THE PROPER AUTHORITIES:—

"In behalf of the Seventh Day Adventists in the United States of America, the Executive Committee of the North American Division Conference of Seventh Day Adventists respectfully submit the following statement:

We believe that civil government is ordained of God and that in the exercise of its legitimate function it should receive the support of its citizens. We believe in the principles upon which this government was founded. We are loyal to its Constitution, which is based upon the principles of democracy and guarantees civil and religious liberty to all citizens.

We deplore that our nation has been drawn into the horrors of war, and shall continually pray that God of Heaven may speedily bring peace to our country.

We have been non-combatants throughout our history. During the Civil War our people officially declared:

"That we recognize civil government as ordained of God, that order, justice, and quiet may be maintained in the land, and that the people of God may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

"In accordance with this fact, we acknowledge the justice of rendering tribute, honor and reverence to the civil power, as enjoined in the New Testament. While we thus cheerfully render to Cæsar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed, as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind.

"We hereby reaffirm the foregoing declaration. We petition that our religious convictions be recognized by those in authority, and that we be required to serve our country only in such capacity as will not violate our conscientious obedience to the Law of God as contained in the decalogue. Interpreted in the teachings of Christ, and exemplified in His life." A commission of five men was selected to present this declaration to the National Government at Washington, D. C. On Friday, April 27, it was placed on file with the Assistant Secretary of War.

This pronouncement is in harmony with the views and practices of our people during the Civil War. On August 3, 1864, the following memorial from the General Conference Committee of Seventh Day Adventists was presented to the Governor of Michigan:

"To His Excellency,

"AUSTIN BLAIR,

"Governor of the State of Michigan:

"We, the undersigned, Executive Committee of

the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, respectfully beg leave to present for your consideration the following statements:

"The denomination of Christians calling themselves Seventh Day Adventists, taking the Bible as their rule of faith and practice, are unanimous in their views that its teachings are contrary to the spirit and practice of war: hence, they have ever been conscientiously opposed to bearing arms. If there is any portion of the Bible which we, as a people, can point to more than another as our creed, it is the law of ten commandments, which we regard as the supreme law, and each precept of which we take in its most obvious and literal import. The fourth of these commandments requires cessation from labor on the seventh day of the week, the sixth prohibits the taking of life, neither of which, in our view, could be observed while doing military duty. Our practice has uniformly been consistent with these principles. Hence, our people have not felt free to enlist into the service. In none of our denominational publications have we advocated or encouraged the practice of bearing arms; and, when drafted, rather than violate our principles, we have been content to pay, and assist each other in paying, the \$300 commutation money. And while that provision remained of universal application, we did not deem any public expression of our sentiments on this question called for.

"We would further represent that Seventh Day Adventists are rigidly anti-slavery, loyal to the government, and in sympathy with it against the rebellion.

"But not having had a long existence as a distinct people, and our organization having but recently

been perfected, our sentiments are not yet extensively known. The change in the law renders it necessary that we take a more public stand in the matter. For this reason we now lay before your Excellency the sentiments of Seventh Day Adventists as a body, relative to bearing arms, trusting that you will feel no hesitation in endorsing our claim that, as a people, we come under the intent of the late action of Congress concerning those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, and are entitled to the benefits of said law.

"JOHN BYINGTON,

"J. N. LOUGHBOROUGH,

"GEO. W. AMADON,

"General Conference Executive Committee of Seventh Day Adventists."

"Battle Creek, Mich., Aug. 2, 1864."

"THE GOVERNOR'S REPLY

"I am satisfied that the foregoing statement of principles and practices of the Seventh Day Adventists is correct, and that they are entitled to all the immunities secured by law to those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, or engaging in war.

"AUSTIN BLAIR,

"Governor of Michigan."

"Dated Aug. 3, 1864."

A little later the Seventh Day Adventists of Wisconsin presented a statement to the Governor of that State:—

"TO THE GOVERNOR OF WISCONSIN

To His Excellency,

JAMES T. LEWIS,

Governor of Wisconsin:

"We, the undersigned, Executive Committee of the Illinois and Wisconsin State Conference of Seventh Day Adventists, subject to the direction of the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists of Battle Creek, Mich., beg leave to present the following for your consideration:

"I That there is under your jurisdiction a religious denomination known as Seventh Day Adventists, and legally organized for the worship of Almighty God, taking the Bible as the rule of their faith and practice; and are unanimous in their views that its teachings are contrary to the spirit and practice of war, hence they have ever been conscientiously opposed to bearing arms.

"II. Our practice has uniformly been consistent with these principles. Hence our people have not felt free to enlist into the service. In none of our denominational publications have we advocated or encouraged the practice of bearing arms. And when drafted, rather than violate our principles, we have been content to pay, and assist each other in paying, the \$300 commutation money. And while that provision remained of universal application, we did not consider a public expression of our sentiments necessary.

"III. We would further add that all Seventh Day Adventists are perfectly loyal and in sympathy with the Government in putting down this wicked rebellion.

"IV. But not having existed long as a distinct people and our organization having but recently been perfected, our sentiments are not extensively known. The change in the law renders it necessary that we take a more public stand in this matter. For this reason we now lay before your Excellency the senti-

ments of Seventh Day Adventists as a body, relative to bearing arms, trusting you will feel no hesitation in endorsing our claim, that as a people, we come under the intent of the late Act of Congress concerning those conscientiously opposed to bearing arms. and are entitled to the benefits of said laws.

"Your obedient servants,

"JOSEPH G. WOOD,

"ISAAC SANBORN,

"H. W. DECKER,

"Executive Committee."

THE GOVERNOR'S RESPONSE

"EXECUTIVE OFFICE,

"MADISON, Aug. 29, 1864.

"To Whom It May Concern:

"I am satisfied that the foregoing statement of the principles of Seventh Day Adventists is correct, and that they are entitled to all the immunities secured by law to those who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms or engaging in war.

"JAMES T. LEWIS,

"Governor of Wisconsin."

On August 29, the Seventh Day Adventists presented a like memorial to the Governor of Illinois with this introduction and result:—

TO THE GOVERNOR OF ILLINOIS

"FREEPORT, ILL., Aug. 29, 1864.

"His Excellency,

"RICHARD YATES,

Governor of Illinois:

"Permit me to introduce to you Messrs. Joseph G. Wood and H. W. Decker, who will fully explain to you the object of their mission.

"There is in this part of our State a number of church organizations of the Seventh Day Adventists, who are as truly non-combatant as the Society of Friends, and who are conscientiously opposed to bearing arms. Now what these gentlemen desire, is to secure for the members of that Society in Illinois, the immunities provided for such persons under the conscription laws. As a class, the members of this Society are thoroughly loyal, and are willing to bear their share of the burdens of the Government in putting down the rebellion, but they cannot conscientiously take up arms. I commend them to your most favorable consideration.

"Sincerely yours,

"THOS. J. TURNER."

"I cordially endorse what Col. Turner has said in the within, and commend his views.

"C. K. JUDSON, P. M.

"JOHN H. ADDAMS."

This statement from friends concerning Adventists in Illinois was referred by Governor Yates to the Honorable E. W. Stanton, Secretary of War in the following words:

"REFERRED TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT,

SPRINGFIELD, ILL., Sept. 19, 1864.

"Respectfully referred to Hon. E. W. Stanton, Sec. of War, Washington, D. C., whose attention is requested to within statements.

"At direction of His Excellency, Gov. Yates.

"JOHN W. SNYDER,

"Col. and A. D. C."

RESPONSE OF THE PRO. MAR. GENERAL

“WAR DEPARTMENT,
“PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL'S OFFICE,
“WASHINGTON, D. C., Sept. 26, 1864.

“His Excellency,
“RICHARD YATES,
“Governor of Illinois,
“Springfield, Ill.

“Sir: “I have the honor to return herewith papers in the case of certain applicants for benefit of provisions of Sec. 17, Act. Feb. 24, 1864, referred by you to the Honorable Secretary of War, and by him referred to this office; and in reply would state that the Section and Act referred to, provide fully for such cases. It is as follows:

“‘And be it further enacted, That members of religious denominations, who shall by oath or affirmation declare that they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and who are prohibited from doing so by the rules and articles of faith and practice of said religious denomination, shall, when drafted into the military service be considered non-combatants, and shall be assigned by the Secretary of War to duty in the hospital, or to the care of Freedmen, or shall pay the sum of Three Hundred Dollars to such person as the Secretary of War shall designate to receive it, to be applied to the benefit of the sick and wounded soldiers; provided that no person shall be entitled to the benefit of the provisions of this Section, unless his declaration of conscientious scruples against bearing arms shall be supported by satisfactory evidence that his deportment has been uniformly consistent with such declaration.

“Such persons must present their claims to the Board of Enrollment of the District in which they reside, who will hear the evidence required by provisions of said Section and Act.

“I have the honor to be, Sir,
Very respectfully,
“Your obedient servant,
“JAMES B. FRY,
“Provost Marshal General.”

In the autumn of 1864, the General Conference decided to present a statement to the Government at Washington, and delegated Elder J. N. Andrews to proceed to Washington for that purpose. The following resolution setting forth the views of Seventh Day Adventists was adopted by the General Conference Committee: “Resolved, That we recognize civil government as ordained of God, that order, justice, and quiet may be maintained in the land; and that the people of God may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty. In accordance with this fact we acknowledge the justice of rendering tribute, custom, honor, and reverence to the civil power, as enjoined in the New Testament. While we thus cheerfully render to Cæsar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind.” /8

In regard to his visit at Washington, Elder Andrews wrote:

"SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS RECOGNIZED AS NON-COMBATANTS"

"In obedience to the instructions of the General Conference Committee, I have visited the Provost Marshal General. The accompanying papers will show what I presented to him. These were all copied and placed on file in the department for reference in case any District Marshal shall refer any matter concerning ourselves to the Provost Marshal General. The originals have just been returned to me with an endorsement stating just what is necessary to be done before the District Marshal in case of draft.

"The Marshal made no use of the pamphlet entitled, 'The Draft,' but stated that it would be a proper document to present before the District Marshal in proof of the non-combatant views of our people. He further stated that the exemption clause of the enrollment law was not construed by him to mean Quakers merely, but to apply to any religious body who held non-combatant views. He has issued orders to all the Deputy Marshals in accordance with this construction of the exemption clause."

"J. N. ANDREWS."

"Washington D. C., Sept. 1, 1864."

(A) "The following are the papers above referred to:

"MICHIGAN MILITARY AGENCY,
"(On E near 7th Street, North),
"WASHINGTON, D. C., Aug. 31, 1864.

"BRIGADIER-GENERAL JAS. B. FRY,

"Provost Marshal General:

"Sir: "Permit me to ask your special attention to the bearer, Rev. J. N. Andrews, a minister of the religious organization known and recognized as the Seventh Day Adventists, a body of Christians, residing in small numbers in each, or nearly all of the free States, who 'are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and who are prohibited from doing so, by the rules and articles of faith and practice of such religious denomination.'

"Rev. J. N. Andrews comes duly accredited as the agent of that organization to ask of you, that the relief contemplated in Section (17) of the Enrollment Act, approved March 3, 1863, may be extended to each, and every member of their organization, provided they shall on oath, or affirmation, declare that 'they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and are prohibited from doing so by the rules and articles of faith and practice of their church, and furnish satisfactory evidence that their deportment has been uniformly consistent with such declaration.'

"Permit me to ask your attention to the endorsement of Austin Blair, Governor of Michigan, on page 9 of the accompanying pamphlet named, 'The Draft,' also to express to you my full confidence in the loyalty and patriotism of the petitioners.

"Your obedient servant,

"J. TUNNICLIFF, JR.,
"Mich. Military Agent."

(B)

"WASHINGTON, D. C., Aug. 30, 1864.

"Sirs: I have the honor to present the accompanying documents showing that I am the duly accredited representative to the Provost Marshal General of the religious denomination styled, Seventh Day Adventists, a people unanimously loyal and anti-slavery, who, because of their views of the ten commandments and of the teachings of the New Testament, cannot engage in bloodshed, and who therefore ask that the provisions of the enrollment act of March 3, 1863 and of July 4, 1864, designed to meet such cases, be applied to themselves.

"Respectfully submitted,

"JOHN N. ANDREWS,

"Minister of the Gospel."

"To Brigadier General James B. Fry, Provost Marshal General."

(C)

"SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST PUBLISHING HOUSE.

"BATTLE CREEK, MICH., Aug. 22, 1864.

"We, the undersigned, General Conference Executive Committee of the denomination of Christians calling themselves Seventh Day Adventists, hereby empower Elder John N. Andrews, an accredited minister of our denomination, to act in our behalf in laying before the Provost Marshal General the sentiments of Seventh Day Adventists in relation to bearing arms and engaging in war.

"JOHN N. LOUGHBOROUGH,

"JOHN BYINGTON,

"GEO. W. AMADON,

"General Conference Executive Committee of Seventh Day Adventists"

D)

"NEWFANE, NIAG. CO., N. Y., Aug. 15, 1864.

To Provost Marshal, GEN. FRY:

"Dear Sir: I learn that there is an effort being made by the denomination of Christians calling themselves Seventh Day Adventists to avail themselves of the exemption clause in the enrollment law, which applies to those who are opposed to war from religious and conscientious convictions.

"My knowledge of them has been quite limited, but so far as I have known them, I have known them to be thoroughly loyal and upright. I have understood them to be, from conscientious convictions founded upon the ten commandments, opposed to engaging in war, and have understood that their course has, as far as possible, been in accordance with such convictions. How far the clause in the law referred to, will be construed to go by the department, I am not aware, but I am in favor of giving them a fair and impartial hearing, and all their rights under such law being granted to them.

"If entitled to such exemption they will be able to show their claims to it. I believe them to be a very conscientious, upright, and consistent people, and that their principles and practices have been uniformly in harmony.

"Respectfully,

"BURT VAN HONE,

"Late M. C., 31st District, N. Y."

"STATE OF NEW YORK, 28TH DISTRICT,
"OFFICE OF THE PROVOST MARSHAL,
"ROCHESTER, Aug. 24, 1864.

"BRIG. GEN. JAMES B. FRY,
"Provost Marshal General:

"Sirs: I have the honor to introduce Rev. J. N. Andrews of this city, who visits Washington upon business connected with his society. He is known to me as a gentleman of integrity, and any statement he may make can be relied upon.

"Very respectfully,

"Your obedient servant,

"ROSELL HART,

"Captain and Provost Marshal,
28th District, N. Y."

"To these the following response was received from the Provost Marshal General:

"PRO. MAR. GEN.'S OFFICE,
"September 1, 1864.

"Respectfully returned to Rev. J. N. Andrews:

"Members of religious denominations, who have been drawn into the draft, and who establish the fact before the Board of Enrollment that they are conscientiously opposed to the bearing of arms, and are prohibited from so doing by their rules and articles of faith, and that their deportment has been uniformly consistent with their professions, will be assigned to duty in hospitals, or to the care of freedmen, or shall be exempt on payment of \$300 to such persons as the Secretary of War may designate.

"By command of the Provost Marshal General

"THEO. McMURTRIE,
"Capt. and A. A. A. G."

The Administration Military Bill

passed by Congress, May 18, 1917, has this exemption for those who do not believe in bearing arms: SECTION 3. That the vice-president of the United States, the officers, legislative, executive, and judicial of the United States and of the several states and territories, duly ordained ministers of religion, students who at the time of the approval of this Act are preparing for the ministry in recognized theological or divinity schools, and all persons in the military and naval service of the United States shall be exempt from the selective draft herein prescribed; and nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to require or compel any person to serve in any of the forces herein provided for who is found to be a member of any well organized religious sect or organization, at present organized and existing, whose creed forbids its members to participate in war in any form, and whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed of said religious organization."

We understand that this section exempts Seventh Day Adventists from bearing arms. We cannot take the lives of our fellow men. We strictly observe God's command to do no work the seventh day, the Sabbath. But we desire to serve the Nation in any way that does not conflict with our conscientious observance of the Law of Ten Commandments. Wherever there are wounds to be healed, danger to be appeased, or other distress to be relieved there Seventh Day Adventists wish to serve.

IN BEHALF OF THE LAKE UNION CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH DAY ADVENTISTS.